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**Autonomist Movements of the Slavophones in 1944:  
The Attitude of the Communist Party of Greece  
and the Protection of the Greek-Yugoslav Border**

The founding of the Slavo-Macedonian Popular Liberation Front (SNOF) in Kastoria in October 1943 and in Florina the following November was a result of two factors: the general negotiations between Tito's envoy in Yugoslav and Greek Macedonia, Svetozar Vukmanovic-Tempo, the military leaders of the Greek Popular Liberation Army (ELAS), and the political leaders of the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) in July and August 1943 to co-ordinate the resistance movements<sup>1</sup>; and the more specific discussions between Leonidas Stringos and the political delegate of the GHQ of Yugoslav Macedonia, Cvetko Uzunovski in late August or early September 1943 near Yannitsa<sup>2</sup>. The Yugoslavs' immediate purpose in founding SNOF was to inculcate a Slavo-Macedonian national consciousness in the Slavophones of Greek Macedonia and to enlist the Slavophones of Greek Macedonia into the resistance movement in Yugoslav Macedonia; while their indirect aim was to promote Yugoslavia's views on the Macedonian Question<sup>3</sup>. The KKE had recognised the Slavophones as a "SlavoMacedonian nation" since 1934, in accordance with the relevant decision by the Comintern, and since 1935 had been demanding full equality for the minorities within the Greek state; and it now acquiesced to the founding of SNOF in the belief that this would draw into the resistance those Slavophones who had been led astray by Bulgarian Fascist propaganda<sup>4</sup>. However,

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1. See T.-A. Papapanagiotou, *L' Effort pour la creation d'un quartier general balcanique et la cooperation balcanique, Juin-Septembre 1943* (unpublished postgraduate dissertation, Sorbonne, 1991); there is a copy in the library of the Institute for Balkan Studies, Thessaloniki.

2. See S. Vukmanovic-Tempo, *Revolucija Koja tece*, vol. 3, Zagreb 1982, p. 114. In a postwar report to the Central Committee of the KKE on SNOF's activities, Stringos had this to say about the meeting: "Abas requested that our sections work together against the Germans and that we make things a little easier for their sections that were obliged, because of the operations, to cross over into Greek territory frequently; and they also offered to help with the work among the Slavo-Macedonians, who were still being influenced by the *komitadjis*". See AM (Arhiv na Makedonija-Skopje), K.20/242.A.

3. Tempo brought up the question of uniting Greek and Yugoslav Macedonia in a future Yugoslav federation when he met Andreas Dzimas, the KKE's representative, in the summer of 1943. He asked Dzima to sign a statement to that effect. Dzimas refused to discuss the subject. See RCHIDNI (Rossijskij Centr Hranenija i Izutenija Dokumentov Novej Pej Istorii), F. 495, Op. 74, D. 177, L. 60, Fitin (Director of Soviet espionage) to Dimitrov, 18 August 1944. This was another fundamental reason why Siandos rejected Tempo's proposals for setting up a Balkan HQ. It was agreed, however, to set up Slavo-Macedonian annexed sections within the framework of ELAS, to foster the Slavo-Macedonian dialect, and to publish Slavo-Macedonian newspapers.

4. According to confidential statistics collected by the Macedonian GHQ early in 1925 (i.e. after the deadline for emigration applications), there were 76,098 Slavophones former Patriarchists in Greek Macedonia and 97,636 Slavophones former Exarchists, of whom 11,228 were due to emigrate to Bulgaria, thus reducing the number of former Exarchists to 86,408. The Slavophones, including those who were bilingual, therefore numbered 162,506 (see I. Mihailidis, 'H Mclxeoovia TOU 1930 IIfaa cso It5 axawtattxE;: H REQiZT(2)an T(1)V okXoXv,v,, *XVth Greek Historical Conference*, Thessaloniki 1994). The Slavophones may be divided into those who regarded themselves as Bulgarians, those who regarded

the Central Committee of the Greek National Liberation Front (EAM) had not approved the founding of SNOF, believing that the new organisation would conduce more to the fragmentation than to the unity of the resistance forces. This made the KKE all the more cautious with regard to the new organisation's activities.

SNOF's progress must be examined in relation to the political developments in Yugoslav Macedonia. Although Tempo managed early in 1943 to establish a Communist party in Yugoslav Macedonia and a GHQ, with Mihailo Apostolski in command and Uzunovski as political delegate, the organisation of the resistance began as soon as the Italians had surrendered and the defeat of Germany was imminent<sup>5</sup>. The resistance movement in Yugoslav Macedonia had two political programmes. The one represented by Tempo and the newly-established Communist Party gave priority to battling against any form of manifest or latent pro-Bulgarian sentiment in Yugoslav Macedonia and to bringing the region into the Yugoslav federation. During the War, the question of uniting the three parts of Macedonia and incorporating them into federal Yugoslavia was considered to be of secondary importance. Attention was chiefly given to spreading propaganda about the right to self-determination of the "Slavo-Macedonian people" in Greece and Bulgaria. Tito shared this view. During the War, veterans of the interwar Bulgarian IMRO and political cadres of IMRO (United) who had accepted Slavo-Macedonism as an ethnic preference now regarded the main objective as being the unification of the three parts of Macedonia into a single state, whose postwar future was to involve not necessarily inclusion in a Yugoslav federation (in which they foresaw a new form of Serbian dominance over Macedonia), but rather membership of a Balkan federation or else independence under the protection of the Great Powers. This policy was chiefly supported by Metodija Andonov-Cento, Mane Cuckov, and Kiril Petrusovski. In 1943, Kiro Gligorov (now President of the FYROM) also favoured this solution. All the same, regardless of their priorities, both sides acknowledged the right of the "Slavo-Macedonian people" to unification.

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themselves as Greeks, and those with a more fluid consciousness. They were incorporated into the Greek state, to which they remained loyal. It is significant that neither the Bulgarian IMRO nor the Communist IMRO (United) exerted much influence on the Slavophones. Their displeasure was chiefly aroused by the policy of "forced Hellenisation" implemented under the Metaxas dictatorship, when they were forbidden to speak the Slavo-Macedonian dialect even in the privacy of their own homes. Although Metaxas' policy was dictated by the necessity of preventing the Communists from infiltrating the Slavophones, after 1934 the KKE regarded them as a "(Slavo-)Macedonian nation" and members of IMRO (United) wrote to *Rizospastis* pointing out the "distinct ethnic status of the (Slavo-)Macedonians" – it may in general terms be described as illconsidered, and ultimately facilitated Bulgarian and Yugoslav propaganda during the occupation.

5. The Bulgarian occupation forces in the Serbian part of Macedonia were received as liberators and pro-Bulgarian feeling ran high in the early stages of the occupation. Neither the Communists' position regarding a separate Macedonian nation nor the idea of a Yugoslav federation met with much response from the Slav population, which nurtured pro-Bulgarian sentiments. The local Communists, led by M. Satorov, splintered off from the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and joined the Bulgarian Labour Party (which was Communist), with the slogan "One state, one party,.". The subsequent dissatisfaction with the occupation authorities was due to social factors (high-handedness, heavy taxation, contempt for local sensitivities) rather than national ones. This was also why Tito's resistance movement in Yugoslav Macedonia failed to develop. See Tempo's speech on 30 January 1945 in Belgrade, PRO FO 371/48181, R2448/11/67, Maclean to Foreign Office, No 121, Belgrade, 31 Jan. 1945.

The founding of SNOF coincided with the second meeting of the Antifascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ) in late November 1943 at Jaice. The Council decided to federalise Yugoslavia and incorporate Macedonia. However, the borders of Tito's "Macedonia" did not appear to include the Yugoslav section alone. The Council elected Dimitar Vlahov as the representative for Greek Macedonia and Vladimir Poptomov as the representative for the Bulgarian section. Directly after the Jaice meeting, military liaison officers from Yugoslav Macedonia (Kiro "Dejan" Georgievski, Petre "Pero" Novacesovski, Kole "Kolja" Todorovski-Kaninski, and Dobrivoje "Orce" Radosavljevic) infiltrated Greek Macedonia to spread propaganda to the effect that the "Macedonian people" in Greece should fight not for equality, as the KKE urged, but for self-determination, unification, and a People's Republic of "Macedonia" on the Yugoslav model, and that they should strive for a separate GHQ and separate armed units. Although the Yugoslav propaganda met with little response from the district committee of the Florina SNOF (whose members included Petros Pilals and Stavros Kotsopoulos), it was eagerly embraced by the district committee of the Kastoria SNOF (whose members included Paskhalis Mitropoulos (Paskal Mitrevski), Naoum Peyios (Naum Pejov), Lazaros Papalazarou (Lazo Poplazarov), and Lazaros Ossenskis (Lazo Damovski-Osenki)). The immediate aims of the Kastoria SNOF were to disarm the slavophone villagers who had been armed by the Bulgarians, to persuade them to join SNOF, and to inculcate a Slavo-Macedonian national consciousness. To this end they were publishing a newspaper titled *Slavjanomakedonski Glas*. Given the Communist position on the existence of a "Slavo-Macedonian nation", members of SNOF demanded that the KKE recognise the Slavophones' right to self-determination. In a letter to the party organisation in Kastoria dated 24 January 1944, Lazaros Ossenskis wrote:

The KKE promises the Slavo-Macedonians full equality in the framework of a People's Republic. However, the prime objective of its struggle is the liberation of the Dodecanese and Cyprus, whose people will be free to take their place in people-governed Greece. The Slavo-Macedonians justifiably ask, Why do they not leave us free to build our own culture and our national ideals, for we too are something separate, we are not Greeks, we are a Slavo-Macedonian race with different ideals, but they want us to remain within the Greek framework, giving us only equality. How does this square with the declared principles of the self-determination of peoples<sup>6</sup>?

Paskhalis Mitropoulos, a graduate of the Law School of Thessaloniki University, was particularly active. Thanks to him, in March 1944 the slavophone sections of the 9th ELAS Division were officially named the ("Slavo-Macedonian Popular Liberation Army" (SNOV) and wore their own badge on their forage-caps. In April 1944, the Yugoslav agents prevented the Slavophones from taking part in the elections for members of the Political Committee of National Liberation (PEEA). The blatant nationalist and autonomist propaganda of some of SNOF's leading cadres and the organisation's close dependence on the GHQ of Yugoslav Macedonia provoked such alarm in the KKE's Macedonia Bureau and in the Macedonian Divisions Group that in May 1944 it was decided to disband the organisation and amalgamate it with EAM. On 16 May 1944, at

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6. Arhiv na Makedonija, *Egejska Makedonija na NOB, 1944-1945, vol. I* (Risto Kirjazovski, Vasil Pejov, Todor Simovski, eds), Skopje 1971, p. 341.

Mitropoulos' instigation<sup>7</sup>, some sixty Slavophones, led by Naoum Peyios and Yorgos Touroundzas defected at Karaorman, seat of the GHQ of Yugoslav Macedonia, vilifying ELAS and EAM for their erroneous policy towards the Slavo-Macedonians.

In an attempt to resolve the crisis that had broken out between the 9th ELAS Division and the GHQ of Yugoslav Macedonia, a committee from the 28th Regiment led by Adjutant Haralambos "Athantos" Haralambidis went to Karaorman and met Kiro "Dejan" Georgijevski on 23 May. Haralambidis protested against the smear campaign being waged against EAM and the KKE by the military liaison officers from Yugoslav Macedonia, demanded that Tito look into the matter, and presented the following demands:

1. that recruiting cease on Greek territory,
2. that all anti-EAM propaganda cease,
3. that Yugoslav partisans seek refuge on Greek territory only when under strong enemy pressure and only for a few days at a time, pending the resolution of all the contentious issues,
4. that Peyios and the other deserters be handed over with their weapons,
5. that Touroundzas be handed over (with protests about the delay),
6. that terrorist tactics for collecting food on Greek territory cease,
7. that ELAS be consulted before any action on Greek territory,
8. that in the absence of ELAS from certain areas, SNOF liaise with the political organizations in its contacts with the people<sup>8</sup>

Georgijevski informed Tempo<sup>9</sup>, who in turn told Tito. Although Tito felt that the Greek Communists' attitude to the issue of the "Macedonians" in Greece was not correct, in order not to impair the Greek resistance movement he recommended that there be no discussion of the unification of Greek and Yugoslav Macedonia for time being<sup>10</sup>. Following Tito's advice, on 17 June 1944 the GHQ of Yugoslav Macedonia sent out a circular to the political agents travelling around Greek Macedonia in which emphasis was laid on the need for a joint struggle between the Greek and the "Macedonian" people.

The Macedonian people in Yugoslavia, in a fraternal common struggle with the Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, and Montenegrin people, are today achieving their dream: a free Macedonia in a democratic federal Yugoslavia. To achieve this national liberation and equality is the goal of the whole Macedonian people today, of all the Macedonians, including those in Greece and Bulgaria...Only through fraternal concord and the common struggle with the Greek and Bulgarian people can the Macedonians in Greece and Bulgaria achieve their full national liberation

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7. Mitropoulos' role in Peyios' disruptive movement was disclosed after investigations conducted by the Macedonia Bureau. See Stringos' report, AM, K.20/242 A.

8. See *Egejska Makedonija*, p. 423.

9. See Kiro Georgijevski's letter dated 25 April 1944 to Tempo; VukmanovicTempo, *Revojucija koja tece*, vol. 3, Zagreb 1982, pp. 269-71.

10. S. Neshovich, "The Correspondence between Tito and Dimitrov on the B.W.P. (c) and Macedonia,, *Macedonian Review*, 3 (1975), 272-3.

and equality, achieve the right to determine their own destiny, a right which the Atlantic Charter guarantees to all enslaved peoples struggling against Fascism<sup>11</sup>.

All the same, the Yugoslav side criticised the KKE before the Soviet military mission at Tito's HQ on the island of Vis for its incorrect policy *vis-a-vis* the Macedonian Question. On the basis of the information from Yugoslavia, Fitin, the head of Soviet espionage, wrote to Dimitrov:

I write to inform you of the intelligence we have received from Yugoslavia regarding the attitude of EAM to the Macedonian Question. In the course of their task of organising the partisan movement in Macedonia, the representatives of the Yugoslav Popular Liberation Army have encountered strong opposition from the EAM partisans. EAM advocates the old Greek border and denies Macedonia self-determination. The Communists also support this stance. In a discussion with a representative of Marshal Tito, the Secretary of the Central Committee of the KKE said that there can be no question of self-determination for Macedonia, since there is no "Macedonian people" as such. The Greek Communists in Macedonia are firmly opposed to the Macedonians' bid for self-determination. They will not allow the Macedonians to conduct their religious ceremonies except according to Greek custom and they persecute those who worship using the Slavonic sacred books in out-of-the-way churches. The Macedonians are forbidden to offer any kind of assistance to Marshal Tito's representatives.... Owing to the exacerbation of the Macedonian Question, EAM partisans have virtually ceased fighting the German conquerors in "their" Macedonia<sup>12</sup>.

These accusations were essentially groundless. After 1934, in accordance with the policy laid down by the Communist International, the KKE recognised the existence of a "Slavo-Macedonian nation", even though the Slavophones in Greek Macedonia were in fact a small linguistic group, rather than a minority in the sense in which the term is used in international law. To recognise their right to self-determination during the War would essentially have meant acknowledging their right to secede, which would have severely prejudiced the EAM/ELAS resistance movement. The KKE felt that the Slavo-Macedonian issues would be resolved only after the War on the basis of democratic principles<sup>13</sup>. After Andreas Dzimas had visited Tito's HQ on 20 June 1944 as the KKE's

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11. See Vukmanovic-Tempo, *op.cir.*, pp. 271-3. It is worth noting that, though Tito regarded the unification of the "Macedonian people,, as something to be considered after the War, he acknowledged the right of the "Macedonian people,, beyond the Yugoslav borders to demand national self-determination and democratic rights during the anti-Fascist struggle. The decision was taken by the national committee for Yugoslav liberation when it convened on Vis on 24 June 1944. The session was attended by, amongst others, I. B. Tito. E. Kardelj, A. Rankovic, M. Djilas, M. A. Tempo, S. V. Tempo. See Iosip Broz Tito, *Sabrana Djela*. vol. 20, Belgrade 1984, pp. 252-3. The fact that the term "self-determination," is open to such a variety of interpretations satisfied not only Tito and Tempo but also Yenta and his colleagues and throughout the War helped to blunt their disagreements over the specific political future of both Yugoslav Macedonia and Macedonia as a whole.

12. See RCHIDNt, F. 495, Op. 74, D. 177, L. 4. Fitin to Dimitrov, 13 July 1944.

13. During talks with the Bulgarian Communists in Sofia in December 1944 (an account of which, together with his report on the political situation in Greece (8 Dec. 1944), was conveyed to the Soviets), Petros Roussos observed that the KKE never underestimated the Macedonian people's struggle for

representative and made contact with the Soviet delegation, in his first report (to General Korneev, head of the Soviet delegation) on the situation in Greece, dated 29 June 1944, he mentioned the Yugoslavs' accusations.

The Yugoslavs' impressions of Greece and the information they are propagating are far from objective.... Failing to understand our position on the Macedonian Question, they are causing us many problems at the frontier. Many of their cadres at the frontier are putting it about that our army is Fascist, that the Intelligence Service has influence in the Central Committee of the KKE. They prevented the Macedonians from taking part in the elections for the Political Committee of National Liberation. All this despite the warm welcome and support we give them. I appeal to you to intervene and set this unpleasant situation to rights. For the sake of 120,000 Macedonians, the Yugoslavs want us to lose the Greek people, who have naturally become extremely sensitive to the national question of late. All the Greek governments in exile would like to exploit this sensitivity to imbue the Greek people with the Great Idea and with chauvinistic sentiments. I beg you to mediate"<sup>14</sup>.

General Korneev's mediation was not considered necessary in the end, because Tito had already intervened to settle the matter. In June 1944, the Central Committee of the KKE decided to allow the Slavophones who had fled to Yugoslavia to return, provided they submit to a process of self-criticism. Although SNOF was not re-established as a political body, the KKE's leaders decided to set up separate SlavoMacedonian battalions<sup>15</sup>. The Central Committee of the KKE was prompted to this decision by the necessity for closer collaboration with Tito, both at the military level\_owing to the Germans' massive mopping-up operations against ELAS in the summer of 1944 and the reestablishment of the autonomist Bulgarian organisation Ohrana, chiefly in the Edessa area\_and at the political level\_on account of the KKE's embarrassment after the signing of the Lebanon Charter. On 16 June 1944, a separate Slavo-Macedonian battalion was set up in the Aridaia-Edessa area as part of the 30th ELAS regiment. This was done on the initiative of Markos Vafiadis, at whose instigation the ELAS GHQ issued the order, despite the opposition of the Macedonia Bureau<sup>16</sup>. Lefteris Foundoulakis of Crete was appointed commander and Georgi D2odLo Urdov political delegate. The haste with which the Slavo-Macedonian battalion was established on Kaimaktchalan was due to the pres-

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liberation, but had to bear in mind the change in the ethnic make-up of Greek Macedonia, where the party's data indicated that there were only 120,000 Macedonians in the area of Florina and Kastana. The KKE could not push the slogan of an Independent Macedonia, because that would disrupt the unity of the Greek people in the struggle against Fascism. "Our party", Roussos continued, "reckoned that that slogan was inappropriate in Greece, because the reactionaries would have exploited it to cultivate chauvinist sentiments in the Greek people. Naturally, we always helped the Macedonians to join forces in a united front against Fascism so that, after the War, they would be able to find a common solution to the issues that concerned them on a democratic basis,.. See RCHIDNI, F. 459, Op. 74, D. 175, L. 34-5.

14. See RCHIDNI, F. 495, Op. 74, D. 176, L. 59, Polititeski Doklad o polozenii v Grecii, Dzimas to Komeev, 29 June 1944.

15. The need to establish separate Slavo-Macedonian battalions was chiefly underlined by Ioannidis. See G. Ioannidis, *Anamnêseis: Problimata tês politikês toy KKE stên Ethnikê Antistasê 1944-1945* (edited by A. Papapanagiotou), Athens 1979, p. 247.

16. See Stringos, post-war report, AM, K. 20/242A.

sing need to undermine Ohrana's bases<sup>17</sup>. On 24 June 1944, Siandos sent Andreas Dzimas a telegram asking him to draw Tito's attention to the German and Bulgarian Fascists' efforts to start up a autonomist movement in Macedonia, as also to the necessity for ELAS and the SerboMacedonians (the Slavo-Macedonians of Yugoslav Macedonia) to make concerted efforts to win the Slavo-Macedonians over and recruit them into separate Slavo-Macedonian armed divisions<sup>18</sup>. Siandos obviously thought Tito was in a position to control future disruptive moves by the Slavonic-speakers.

However, the emergence of the "People's Republic of Macedonia" at the first meeting of the Antifascist Assembly for the National Liberation of Macedonia (ASNOM) on 2 August 1944 produced a new parameter in the Macedonian Question. The presiding committee of ASNOM was dominated by elements that were not known for their pro-Yugoslav sentiments<sup>19</sup>. They wanted Tito to secure as much independence as possible for Yugoslav Macedonia and gave priority to the unification of the three segments of Macedonia. To Tempo's great displeasure, Metodija Andonov-tento was elected president and Panko Brasnarov (a member of IMRO (United) between the Wars) vice-president.

On 2 August 1944, the anniversary of the Ilinden Uprising, the Florina and Kastoria Slavo-Macedonian battalion (known as the "Goce Battalion") was established in the village of Halara (Pozdivista) in the presence of representatives of the KKE, the Communist Party of Yugoslav Macedonia, and the political delegate of the 9th ELAS Division, Renos Mihaleas. The commander was Ilias "Goce" Dimakis and the political delegate Hristos Kokkinos.

Goce began systematically recruiting Slavophones in order to swell the battalion's numbers from the original 400. At the same time, liaison officers from Yugoslav Macedonia, notably Petre "Kocko" Bogdanov, were once again spreading propaganda about the right of the "Macedonian people" to self-determination and unification and demanding a GHQ<sup>20</sup>. Having a somewhat hazy Leninist notion of the right to self-

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17. On 14 June 1944 some fifty tMRO veterans, led by Georgi Dimcev, an officer in the Bulgarian air force, established themselves in Edessa, where they made up the officers, corps of the Third Macedonian Brigade. The members of the brigade had been conscripted from the three Macedonian prefectures (Florina, Kastoria, and Edessa). Two battalions, each 250 strong, comprised the main body of the brigade, and the civil guard supported its operations against the Communists. Three SS officers, Heyde, Hellman, and Degler, planned the operations and they were carried out by Brigadier DimPev. In July 1944, one of the two battalions led by Kallev left Edessa and headed for the mountain villages of Vermio and Pindos. Dirntev and the other battalion undertook to confront ELAS at its strongholds near Edessa Ohrana's main political slogan was "Independent Macedonia".

18. See Siandos to Dzima, 24 June 1944, in *KPG i Makedonskoto Nacionalno PraSank 1918-1974* (edited by R. Kirjazovski), Arhiv na Makedonija, Skopje 1982, p. 214.

19. While preparations were being made for ASNOM,s first council at Prohor PLinski Monastery, there were sharp exchanges between Tempo and tento, the latter challenging Tempo,s right (and consequently his clique,s right) to meddle in Slavo-Macedonian affairs and to give party posts to individuals who had done their political training in Belgrade. See F. Tanaskova, *Metodija Andonov-tento*, published by Nova Makedonia, Skopje 1990, pp. 34-5 .

20. Kotsopoulos, report is revealing: "In the summer of 1944, following an 'agreement, between Tempo and the 9th ELAS division, they all came back and, together with some of Tito's supporters, embarked upon 'self-criticism'. G. Touroundzas was travelling around the Florina villages accompanied by Kotskos. Peyios and Dejan were going round the Kastoria villages. And Makris was going round Prespa with an Albanian. Ilias Touroundzas was going around with Renos [Mihaleas]. During the self-criticism

determination, Mihaleas tolerated these activities and had frequent clashes with the KKE's Macedonia Bureau, which later stripped him of his title. In a letter to Leonidas Stringos in August 1944, he wrote:

We have not spread the watchword of ethnic equality in the broadest, freest sense. We have not spread and analysed the message of the Atlantic Charter, the hard-won trophy of the people's struggle. Rather than being his homeland, striking terror and confusion into the heart of capitalism and Fascism, Tito's Macedonia has been a thorn in our side. The Cypriot hails Free Greece and the Atlantic Charter and the Macedonian hails Tito and the Atlantic Charter. So, more broadly, or rather more profoundly, than the 6th Plenary *isiCI* we shall have to show him the close embrace of '21 and Ilinden, and only then will our watchword of "Ethnic equality today!" gleam in his eye<sup>21</sup>.

As a result of this dangerous development, the 28th Regiment decided to incorporate the Goce Battalion into the Vitsi Detachment on 10 September 1944. Kosmas Spanos-Amyndas, an Albanian from Lehovo, was appointed commander and Goce was demoted to captain<sup>22</sup>; but in fact the latter still controlled the battalion. At the same time, the KKE's Macedonia Bureau decided to stop recruiting Slavophones. On 12 September, Stringos wrote to Siandos:

We cannot conceal from you our grave disquiet regarding the attitude of the Serbo-Macedonians. Naturally the attitude of the Slavo-Macedonians here in Greece has been very good of late\_co-operation with the Greek element and a common struggle that grows ever stronger. In the Pelo area, i.e. Korestia, we have done good work and people are following our policy. But the Serbo-Macedonians are still the storm petrel. First there was the ultimatum from the Macedonian HQ [i.e. the circular of 17 June 1944] that we sent you; then their efforts to arm the Slavo-Macedonians without giving us arms. Our second delegation went to Prespa to get arms (the other is on Kaimaktchalan) and brought back any number of accusations. Among all the Slavo-Macedonian formations, Peyios has become a hero; it is being widely said that Florina, Kastoria, and Thessaloniki belong to Macedonia.... For our part, we think that, without making it obvious, we should stop recruiting Slavo-Macedonians altogether and continue our policy of bringing about a closer *rapprochement* between Slavo-Macedonians and Greeks. But we also feel that you must prevail upon Tito, because the attitude of some cadres is verging on provocation<sup>23</sup>.

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they were saying that we should fight with the Greeks, but start demanding guarantees of our rights immediately. At the same time, they were secretly arranging for ELAS members to desert, creating the cells of their organisations in the villages. and making preparations for the general break up. At this point, Goce had not laid his cards on the table. But he was working secretly, combing the Korestia and Prespa villages and telling the Slavo-Macedonian cadres that the KKE was ignoring them and taking the wrong line over the Macedonian Question, etc. He spoke like this to me too,.. See Report by Kotsopoulos to the Central Committee of the KKE (1 Oct. 1952), AM, F-19/191.

21. Mihaleas to Stringos (August 1944), AM, K-20/96.

22. See *Egejska Makedonija*, p. 467.

23. Stringos to the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the KKE, 12 Sept. 1944, AM, K-62/52. In a speech delivered in Kastoria in mid-September 1944, Mitropoulos made specific reference to



Goce refused to obey the Macedonia Bureau's order to stop recruiting and, without checking their identity, accepted into his battalion men from both Yugoslav Macedonia and Bulgaria, the latter chiefly Bulgaro-Macedonians who had emigrated to Bulgaria from Greek Macedonia between the Wars<sup>24</sup>. He saw fit to send Peyios and Thanassis Korovessis (Atanas Korovesov) to GHQ in Yugoslav Macedonia to receive instructions so that he could co-ordinate his subsequent actions. In late September 1944, Peyios and Korovessis brought back the “directives”, as GHQ termed them: the Goce Battalion was to continue recruiting and should demand that the KKE set up a special Macedonian army and staff. If the KKE refused, Goce was to go ahead and recruit as many Slavo-Macedonians as possible and then bring his battalion to Yugoslav Macedonia, where the new recruits would be armed and the Goce Battalion, reinforced with men from Yugoslav Macedonia, would return to Greek Macedonia to liberate Florina, Kastoria, Edessa, and other areas still in German hands<sup>25</sup>. Above all, the Allies' attention had to be drawn to the Macedonian Question.

GHQ's instructions were received with some scepticism by a few of the battalion's leaders, who were well aware that the KKE would not meet their demands and therefore thought a clash with ELAS more than likely. On 3 October 1944, Naoum Soupourkas (Naum Sopurkov), the staff officer in charge of the battalion's political affairs, advised Hristos Kokkinos (Hristo Kolencev), the battalion's political delegate, to inform the Central Committee as a precautionary measure<sup>26</sup>. It remains uncertain whether or not Kokkinos did inform the KKE of Goce's plans, but the contacts between GHQ in Yugoslav Macedonia and the Goce Battalion were already common knowledge in party circles in Kastoria. In a letter to the Macedonia Bureau (dated 1 October 1944), the secretary of the Kastoria branch of the KKE, A. Andonopoulos, pointed out the danger posed by the activities of the “Serbo-Macedonians” and informed the Macedonia Bureau of a decision to purge the battalion of former autonomist Ohrana cadres and foreign elements<sup>27</sup>.

Sensing the danger of renewed disruption, the 28th Regiment ordered the Goce Battalion to move towards Siatista and take part in operations against the Germans. Goce refused, because it would mean moving away from the cover provided by the frontier. On 5 October 1944, a meeting took place in the village of Melas between representatives of the 9th ELAS Division and representatives of the battalion, but to no avail<sup>28</sup>. Another order from the 28th Regiment to cover the areas the battalion had abandoned was ignored by Goce, who, with the slogan “Free Macedonia”, continued his campaign of

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the right of the “Macedonian people” to self-determination, which provoked objections from the local KKE secretary Andonis Andonopoulos Periklis. See T. Marnurovski, *Paskal Mitrevski i negovoto vreme* (1912-1978), Skopje 1992, p. 41.

24. See the report by Andonopoulos (secretary of the Kastoria branch of the KKE) and G. Fourkiotis (secretary of the Florina branch of the KKE) to the KKE's Macedonia Bureau, 27 Sept. 1944, *KPG i Makedonskoto Nacionalno Prasanje*, p. 239.

25. See Soupourkas, interesting report to the Central Committee of the KKE, 15 Nov. 1947, AM, F-20Q19. Soupourkas was a member of the Goce Battalion.

26. *Op.cit.*

27. See *KPG i Makedonskoto Nacionalno Prasanje*, pp. 243-5.

28. See I. Koliopoulos, *Leêlasia Fronêmatôn: To Makedoniko Zêtêma stên katechomenê Dytikê Makedonia (1941-1944)*, Vanya Publications, Thessaloniki 1994, p. 186.

conscription, obtaining his arms and supplies from Yugoslav Macedonia<sup>29</sup>. His battalion swelled to 1,500 men. In view of this disagreeable turn of events, and despite the opposition of Stringos, who evidently wanted Tito to be told about the Goce problem, Kalambalikis, commander of the 9th Division, obtained permission from ELAS GHQ to attack the battalion<sup>30</sup>. On 10 October 1944 the staff of the 28th Regiment issued Goce with an ultimatum to the effect that he was to disarm his battalion; those who had been conscripted could be dismissed and the rest incorporated into a new regiment<sup>31</sup>. To avoid a direct confrontation with ELAS, on 12 October at Kocko's urging<sup>32</sup> Goce ordered his battalion to retire to Yugoslav Macedonia, and the move took place with no more than some of the minor skirmishes that had been going on since 5 October<sup>33</sup>. The Slavophone 575-strong Aridaia-Edessa Battalion<sup>34</sup>, which enjoyed considerable independence, adopted the same course. On the night of 12 October, led by staff officer Pavle Rakovski, the battalion secretly defected to Yugoslav Macedonia. In order not to arouse the suspicions of Battalion Commander Foundoulakis, the battalion's political delegate Georgi-D2odRo Urdov remained in Greece that night and deserted the next day<sup>35</sup>.

As soon as the news of the Goce Battalion's desertion broke, the delegation from the 9th Division comprising Renos Mihaleas, Mihalis Keramidzis (Mihailo Keramidiev)\_a Slavophone and the PEEA'^ representative in Kastoria\_and Lambros Tsolakis went to GHQ in Yugoslav Macedonia to report the split and to discuss the new issues arising from it. The meeting with Tempo, Radosavljevic, and Kolisevski was fruitless, however, for they condemned the KKE for its erroneous policy over the Macedonian Question and approved Goce's conduct<sup>36</sup>. On 29 October Tempo sent a telegram to Tito's HQ requesting clear official Yugoslav support for the Macedonian national liberation movement in Greece, because the Greeks "are taking full advantage of our silence and openly saying that Tito disapproves of the Macedonian national movement in Greece and does

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29. See the radio telegram (8 Oct. 1944) from Koundourelis, a member of the KKE's Macedonia Bureau, to Stringos, *KK; i Makedonskoto Nacionalno Praganje*, pp. 254-5.

30. See Stringos' report (25 Oct. 1944) to the Central Committee of the KKE, *KPG i Makedonskoto Nacionalno Praganje*, pp. 282-3.

31. See *op.cit.*, pp. 258-9.

32. See Lefteris Katsakos' postwar (1952) report to the Central Committee of the KKE: "It has been established that while the negotiations were taking place to calm things down in Melas between the G(xe members and our own men, Kocko was hiding in the house next door and directing the talks. It was he who eventually gave the signal for them to move on to Prespa and from there to Boufi-Kratero and then to Yugoslavia". AM, F-19/155.

33. See the report by Lieutenant Pavios Tsarnis, commander of the Vitsi Detachment, which is an appendix to Evangelos Kofos, study, *Ê Balkanikê diastasê toy Makdonikoy Zêtêmatow sta chronia tês katochê kai stên antistasê*, Athens 1989, pp. 57-65.

34. See V. Ajanovski-OLe, *Egejski Buri: Revolucionernoto DviZenje vo Vodensko s NOF vo Egejska Makedonija*, Skopje 1975, p. 139.

35. For the Aridaia-Edessa Battalion, see T. Mamurovski, "Vodenskiot makedonski batatjon na ELAS", *Glasnik na Institutot za nacionalna istorija*, XXV (1981), Nos 2-3, 185197, partic. 196-7.

36. See Tsolakis' autobiography, appendix to the postwar report on the activities of SNOF and NOF to the Central Committee of the KKE, AM, F-20/268. The delegation was sent without the approval of the Macedonia Bureau. Stringos expressed his displeasure over the fact that negotiations on foreign affairs were now in the hands of the Papandrou administration. See radio telegram from Stringos (25 Oct. 1944) to 9th Division, *KPG i Makedonskoto Nacionalno Praganje*, p. 281.

not want to be involved in Greece's domestic affairs"<sup>37</sup>. After the split, men of the Goce Battalion infiltrated Greek Macedonia to distribute propaganda sheets vaunting a "free and independent Macedonia" and demanding renewed conscription<sup>38</sup>. The question of the security of the Greek-Yugoslav border thus came up for discussion. Troops from the 27th Regiment were already guarding the Prespa frontier zone and members of the Vitsi Detachment the area between Akrita and Ayia Paraskevi; and in October 1944 the KKE's Macedonia Bureau decided to close the border. On 3 November, following the liberation of Thessaloniki, the commander of the Macedonia Divisions Group, Evripidis Bakirdzis, ordered the 10th and 9th Divisions to form frontier sections to guard the border and control the main passes. The order ended by stressing the need for "the composition of the squads in the sections" to be such as to "prevent any propaganda activities by the Macedonian autonomists"<sup>39</sup>. For obvious reasons, Slavophones who did not enjoy the confidence of EAM were excluded from the frontier sections<sup>40</sup>. In order to counteract the Yugoslavo-Macedonian propaganda, the KKE decided to implement the declarations regarding the equality of minorities. So, in anticipation of liberation, Slavo-Macedonian schools began to be built and the institution of local government was inaugurated with the appointment of Slavophone officials<sup>41</sup>.

Out of the Goce Battalion and the Aridaia-Edessa Battalion, "the First Aegean Macedonian Brigade" was formed in Monastir on 18 November, its purpose being to "liberate Aegean Macedonia". The commander was Ilias Dimakis, vice-commander Naoum Peyios, political delegate Mihalis Keramidzis, and vice-delegate Vangelis Ayannis (Vangel Ajanovski-Oce)<sup>42</sup>. Bulgaro-Macedonians also poured into the Stip and Skopje camps; they had emigrated to Bulgaria from Greek Macedonia between the Wars and now presented themselves as Macedonian nationalists anxious to fight for the "liberation of Thessaloniki". These irredentist plans were supported both by the GHQ of Yugoslav Macedonia (Apostolski and Uzunovski) and by President Metodija Andonovtento. However, Tito was wary and summoned Paskhalis Mitropoulos to Belgrade in November and announced that it was as yet too early to bring up the question of the liberation of Thessaloniki<sup>43</sup>. Despite Tito's instructions, on 3 December Mitropoulos went ahead and set up "the Political Committee of Aegean Macedonia". The December Uprising had broken out in Athens, and in Monastir discussions were afoot as to whether or not "the Aegean Macedonian Brigade", which had expressed the desire to fight as a "Macedonian army" with ELAS against Zervas in Epirus, should be sent into Greece. Suspecting that if "the Aegean Macedonian Brigade" did go to Greece as a "Macedonian army" it would occupy Macedonian towns and essentially turn against ELAS, on 14 December Andreas Dzimas went to Monastir and announced the brigade should either hand over its weapons to ELAS or disband, go to Greece, and fight Zervas simply as a section of ELAS<sup>44</sup>.

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37. Vukmanovic-Tempo, *Revolucija koja teee*, vol. 3, p. 257.

38. See e.g. *Egejska Makedonija*, pp. 503, 520.

39. *Op.cit.*, p. 521.

40. See the report (5 Jan. 1945) by Fourkiotis, Secretary of the Communist organisation of Florina, to the Macedonia Bureau, *KPG i Makedonskoto Nacionalno Pra3anje*, pp. 322-3.

41. See reports October-December 1944, *op.cit.*, pp. 283-4, 300 2.

42. See Ajanovski-Ote, *Egejski Buri*, p. 140.

43. See Soupourkas, report (15 Nov. 1947) to the CentrS Committee of the KKE, AM, F-20/219.

44. N. Pejov, *Prilozi za odnosot na rakovoditelnoto na KPG po makedonskoto nacionalnopraxanje*, Skopje 1953, p. 52.

The movements of “the Aegean Macedonian Brigade” alarmed Maclean, leader of the British military mission in Yugoslavia, and in mid-December he voiced protests to Tito. Tito hastened to reassure him that no military unit would cross the Greek-Yugoslav border<sup>45</sup>. With a political leadership in Skopje that was interested not in bringing Yugoslav Macedonia into the Yugoslav Federation so much as in seceding and establishing a united and independent Macedonia<sup>46</sup>, and given that Yugoslavia was not yet fully liberated and priority had to be given to the problem of Trieste, Tito was walking a delicate tightrope and had no desire to clash with the British. He wrote to GHQ in Yugoslav Macedonia forbidding “the Aegean Macedonian Brigade” to enter Greece<sup>47</sup>. To its members' chagrin, the brigade was ordered soon afterwards to fight against Balli Kombetar's Albanian nationalist bands in Gostivar. Those who had come from Bulgaria and presented themselves as Macedonian nationalists were ordered to fight the Gennans on the Srem front. Any who refused were executed on Tempo's orders at the Kalje camp in Skopje on 6 January 1945<sup>48</sup>. The “Aegean Macedonian Brigade” was disbanded on 6 May 1945 and its members incorporated into the Yugoslav army, while Tito gradually assumed control over Yugoslav Macedonia<sup>49</sup>.

Goce's secessionist movement has been the subject of much discussion. The official historical version presented by Skopje is that the Slavo-Macedonians' disruptive actions resulted from the KKE's erroneous policy over the Macedonian Question and EAM's concessions to Greek reaction and British policy (Lebanon and Kazerta), which made the Slavo-Macedonians afraid that the old bourgeois chauvinist regime would be restored and increased their need to differentiate their position from that of EAM/ELAS<sup>50</sup>. This is a mistaken *a posteriori* interpretation of events. It is part of the general opinion expressed by Yugoslav historians that the basic reason for of EAM's defeat was the failure to

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45. See E. Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe during the Second World War*, London 1976, p. 200.

46. At the second ASNOM Council (late Dec. 1944), Tempo and Kardelj pointed out the danger of secession; see PRO, FO 371/48181, R2107/11/67, Brigadier Maclean to Sir Orme Sargent, Belgrade, 7 January 1945.

47. See Soupourkas' report above, AM, F-20/219.

48. Addressing the Bulgaro-Macedonians who refused to fight the Gennans on the Srem front and wanted to march on Thessaloniki, Tempo said: “You've spent the whole war in Bulgana. You haven't fired a single shot at the conqueror. And now all of a sudden you're Macedonians, yelling that you want to fight for the liberation of Macedonia and that's why you don't want to go to the Srem front. Well, let me tell you you're not Macedonians at all. I'm more of a Macedonian than you are, I fought for the freedom of Macedonia when you were living in freedom in Bulgana”. See Vukmanovit-Tempo, *Revolucija koja teee*, vol. 3, p. 301. The Yugoslav leaders regarded those from Bulgana as Fascist and reactionary elements seeking the secession of Yugoslav Macedonia from the Yugoslav federation and the founding of an independent Macedonia.

49. The “Macedonising” of Yugoslav Macedonia was no easy process. The first task was to break up all the Bulganian organisations that opposed the idea of anti-Bulganian based Macedonism. Those who did not want Yugoslav Macedonia to be incorporated into the Yugoslav federation but preferred it to be independent were sentenced to death or imprisonment, accused of being pro-Bulganian supporters of Mihajlov. The victims included the president of ASNOM and first president of the Federal Socialist Republic of Macedonia, M. A. Cento. For the trials and subsequent developments, there is much to be learnt from S. Risteski's book, *Sudeni za MakedoniVa (1945-1985)*, Skopje 1993.

50. R. Kirjazovski, “Lerinsko-Kosturskiot Makedonski Bataljon: 40 godini od negovoto formiranje”, *Istonja*, XXI (1985), No 1, 89-90.

establish a Balkan HQ and the attachment of ELAS to the Middle East HQ, which meant that the EAM/ELAS resistance movement was directly dependent on British policy. When Peyios' split took place, the Lebanon Charter had not yet been signed. The forming of an interim government of national unity was a common phenomenon in countries with resistance movements. Tito himself had concluded an agreement on 16 June 1944 with Subasic's government in exile. Furthermore Tito's partisans also received British assistance. The KKE could not implement the Yugoslav Communist Party's policy on the Macedonian Question, because conditions in Greek Macedonia were very different from those in Yugoslav Macedonia. The autonomist movements of the Slavophones in Greek Macedonia were above all a result of the expansionist policy of the political and military agencies in Yugoslav Macedonia and were fomented by the military liaison officers operating in Greek Macedonia. They followed the same policy with regard to Bulgarian Macedonia even before the political swing of 9 September. The response was muted, however. Goce conscripted some 1,500 individuals and Urdov 575, and 5,000 Slavophones fought in the ranks of ELAS. Many of those who followed Goce soon realised the rash nature of the movement and expressed their desire to return. Naoum Soupourkas, who was in charge of the Goce Battalion's political affairs, was a typical case.

Leading cadres of the KKE also cite the autonomist propaganda being spread by the Yugoslav agents in Greek Macedonia, though they also express the opinion that the British fostered Goce's disruptive action. In his postwar report to the Central Committee of the KKE, Stringos wrote:

Goce's split from the sections of the 9th Division was directed by all the existing elements, but most immediately by the Mitrovski clique. The split took place precisely the day before the liberation of Greece and its purpose was to further the plans of the [British], i.e. to weaken us at the most decisive moment. The [British] on the one hand parachuted in extra supplies for the Goce section in order to reinforce it and on the other used their agents or influential men (Kalabalikis, Bakirdzis, etc.) to try to persuade us to concentrate our forces against the Goce section. Kalabalikis requested that the forces be directed towards Goce, and this was countermanded by the intervention of the organisers. Just before our forces were concentrated on Thessaloniki, Bakirdzis also requested that our forces be directed towards Goce. This too was countermanded thanks to the intervention of the party organisers<sup>51</sup>.

Extreme views were expressed by Markos Vafiadis, who, with Bakirdzis, was joint commander of the Macedonia Group Division.

The [British], who were also kindling chauvinist tendencies in the Macedonian element in this way, could not have been better pleased [by the political atmosphere after the signing of the Lebanon Charter] and they lost no time in pushing the Slavo-Macedonian sections, particularly the one on Vitsi, into open conflict with the other sections of ELAS that were "aliens on Macedonian territory". It started to disobey orders, tacitly at first, with the Commander's [Goce's] announcement that it was "an independent section". It was common knowledge by now that Goce was being seen with the [British] Captain Evans, and soon afterwards it became known that Evans and Goce had come to an

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51. AM, K-2on42 A.

agreement involving money, weapons, munitions, and drops of supplies for the brigade, so that, with the other brigade on PalXo, it could take Thessaloniki<sup>52</sup>.

It is an indisputable fact that the British tried to prevent ELAS from entering Thessaloniki in October 1944. But to allege that, in their efforts to weaken ELAS, British soldiers went so far as to encourage the Slavophones' irredentist aspirations against the territorial integrity of Greece is a baseless hypothesis that directly contradicts British policy. There can be no doubt that Stringos' and Vafiadis' views were a result of their political prejudices about the role of the British. In his confidential final report on his activities (1 December 1944), Captain P. H. Evans, liaison officer in Western Macedonia from March to December 1944, mentions no private transactions with Goce, merely that they met once<sup>53</sup>. By his own admission, Evans knew nothing about the Macedonian Question. He never doubted the existence of a Slavomacedonian patriotic sentiment, which, however, he regarded as more in the nature of a localistic feeling. What particularly struck the young officer was the fluidity of the Slavophones' national consciousness, which was determined chiefly by motives of self-interest<sup>54</sup>. Evans' final conclusion was that the Slavophones could easily remain in the Greek state, since it ensured them better living conditions and permitted them to speak their local dialect, as also that no objective preconditions existed for a "free Macedonia"<sup>55</sup>.

There can be no doubt that, during the occupation and in order to keep EAM together, the KKE handled the Macedonian Question sensitively. However, the recognition of the existence of a "Macedonian nation" (which was the KKE's fundamental mistake and the source of its inconsistent policy *vis-a-vis* the Macedonian Question), the confusion of the national and the ideological sphere, and above all the influence of external factors, all had the effect of making the Slavophones in Greek Macedonia opt for different political choices than the official party line. But the situation was not out of control, and the majority of the Slavophones preferred to fight in the ranks of ELAS, rather than SNOF and the Goce Battalion. The unstable political situation in Greece following the Varkiza agreement, coupled with the Civil War, presented the KKE leadership with some difficult decisions and made the Macedonian Question its Achilles' heel.

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52. See M. Vafiadis, *Apomnêmoneymata*, vol. II (1940-4), Athens 1985. p. 201.

53. A. Rossos, "The Macedonians of Aegean Macedonia: A British Officer's Report, 1944", *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 69 (1991), No. 2, 304.

54. "It is this perfect duplicity of the Macedonians which makes them difficult to know. It is hard to find out what they are thinking.... I have often been struck by this ambivalence or more-than-ambivalence of the Slavs in Greece, their willingness to go in this direction or that according to the vagaries of propaganda and the altering pressure of circumstances. They are a set of muddleheaded peasants who perhaps hardly know from one month to the next what they really want", *op.cit.*, pp. 297-8.

55. "If Greece can give the Macedonians what they want—freedom of language and a somewhat better life—they want to remain Greek citizens... There can be no independent Macedonia. Even if one regards it, as I do, as right, in the abstract, that there should be, one has to concede that practically it is undesirable", *op.cit.*, pp. 298, 308.